Session for Teens – Lateral Thinking

The session is a mix of fun activities (linked to various aspects of lateral thinking) as well as a brief overview of the key principles behind lateral thinking.

Goal of the Session

- Help teens think beyond obvious answers
- Encourage creative risk-taking and collaboration
- Show that there is more than one “right” way to think

 1.5-Hour Session Flow (90 minutes)

Activities

1. Silent Line-Up Challenge (5–10 min)

Objectives: Sometimes kids come to the session in a tired or lethargic situation. The purpose of this activity is to get them moving and raise energy levels so that they can attend the remaining class with high energy. The secondary objective is to explain to them that we can find ways to do something when we really want to irrespective of the situation and circumstances we are in.

What it builds: Non-verbal communication, creative signaling

How

- Ask them to line up without talking by:
    - Birthday (month & day)
    - Height
    - Alphabetical order of first name
    - Or any other way they figure out

Lateral thinking moment

- They invent gestures, symbols, and strategies on the fly
- Debrief.
- Ask: “How did you solve it without your usual tools?”

2. “Impossible Answers” (10 minutes)

Context: After the previous activity which raise their physical energy levels, now we need to activate their brains and thinking. This is what this activity intends to achieve.

Purpose: Warm up brains + break fear of being wrong

How it works

Ask odd questions and celebrate weird answers

- How could you measure a building without a ruler?
- How could you weigh an elephant without a scale?

No judging. Applause for the strangest ideas.

Key message:

- Wrong answers don’t exist here.
- Sometimes the craziest ideas are the best
- All great people are initially thought to be out of their mind. Time proves that they were the real sane ones.

وَقَالُوا۟ يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِى نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ ٱلذِّكْرُ إِنَّكَ لَمَجْنُونٌ ﴿٦﴾

3. A single picture can tell many stories

Show a picture to students and ask them to write what they think is happening in that picture.

They will come up with many different answers.

This powerful and valuable creative exercise teaches children the importance of considering the possible perspectives of others … a skill in too short supply these days.

Lesson:

- The same story can tell many stories.
- Therefore do not think what you know is the only true story
- You might be wrong (a lesson about vulnerability)

4. The Floor Is Lava… with Rules (10–15 min)

Activity Plan: ***The Floor Is Lava… with Rules***

Duration: 10–15 minutes
Purpose: Build **constraint-based creativity**, inspired by **Edward de Bono's Lateral Thinking** concepts.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the activity, participants will:

- Experience how **constraints spark new ideas** (De Bono's "Provocation" & "Challenge" tools)
- Practise **thinking beyond obvious patterns**
- Collaborate using alternative routes instead of habitual ones
- Understand how **limitations force creative shifts** (a key premise in lateral thinking)

Activity Setup

Materials

- A clear floor space
- "Safe spots": paper sheets, mats, cardboard pieces (fewer than number of participants)
- Optional blindfold

Space Prep

- Mark a **start line** and **finish line** (approx. 5–8 metres apart)
- Place safe spots in a pile at the start

□ How It Works

1. Briefing (1 minute)

Explain the challenge:

“Your team must cross from the start to the finish without anyone touching the floor.
The only things protecting you from the lava are these safe spots.”

No other rules are given initially—let them figure out approaches.

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2. Round 1: The Basic Challenge (5 minutes)

Teams:

- Collect their limited safe spots
- Strategise
- Get everyone across safely

Let them experiment with patterns and assumptions.

□ Add Creative Constraints ("De Bono Twists")

Introduce 1–2 constraints per round. Each is designed using De Bono's lateral-thinking triggers:

Twist Options

Twist	Link to De Bono
Fewer mats than people	Forces **provocation** ("What if we can't do it the normal way?")
Mats cannot be dragged	Breaks habitual behaviour → stimulates **movement** thinking
One person cannot talk	Encourages **alternative forms of communication** (De Bono's "Challenge" tool)
One person is blind (eyes closed, guided verbally)	Forces **new patterns** and leadership shifts
Mats disappear after they've been stepped on twice	A "random input" that forces new strategies

You can run:

- A "light" version (1 twist)

- ‘A “chaos creativity” version (3 twists at once)

□ Facilitator Tips

- Celebrate unusual strategies
- Don’t correct them—let the constraints force the creativity
- Allow them to fail briefly; creativity often emerges after initial frustration
- Encourage “try it and see” (a De Bono principle)

□ Debrief (3–5 minutes)

This is the most important component—link behaviour to lateral thinking explicitly.

Ask:

1. **“How did the limitations change the way you approached the problem?”**
   → Helps participants recognise they abandoned default patterns.

2. **“What ideas emerged that you *never* would have considered without the constraints?”**
   → Illuminates De Bono’s point: creativity = the deliberate search for alternatives.

3. **“Which twist created the biggest shift in thinking?”**
   → Shows where their habitual logic was disrupted.

4. **“How did roles or communication change under pressure?”**
   → Links to *design thinking & team collaboration*.

Explicit Link to Edward de Bono (Use in Wrap-Up)

Close with something like:

“Edward de Bono taught that creativity doesn’t come from talent—it comes from **changing the pattern**. Constraints force the brain out of automatic thinking and into new directions.

Today, the ‘lava rules’ acted as deliberate provocations. They made you explore alternatives, experiment, and rethink assumptions. That is lateral thinking in action.”

5. Man in elevator question (3 min)

Purpose: Stretch thinking patterns

A man lives on the 10th floor. He takes the elevator to the 7th floor and walks the rest. Why?

Possible answer: He’s short and can’t reach higher buttons.

Lesson: Always look at various possibilities rather than going to judgement straight away.

In our deen, we are encouraged to have good perceptions of others (Husn Adh-Dhan) rather than attaching labels to them (e.g. ‘jealous’, ‘crazy’, ‘unintelligent’ etc.)

6. Freeze & Solve (10 min)

What it builds: Rapid reframing

How:

- Two volunteer students act out a normal scene (classroom, bus stop)
- Facilitator shouts “Freeze!”
- Another student steps in, replaces one actor, and changes the scene in a completely new direction

Rule: No explanation—just action

Debrief:

- “How fast did your brain switch paths?”
- Sometimes, all it needs is to change a small thing to change the whole perception

Examples of when a small little change can bring big benefits:

Adding Winglets to Planes

Small change: A slight upward curve at the end of wings.
Big impact:

- Saves airlines **billions** in fuel
- Reduces emissions

- Improves aircraft range

 Small curve → huge efficiency gains.

Hand Gel Dispensers Everywhere

Small change: Put dispensers at every doorway.
Big impact:

- Reduced hospital infections drastically
- No more, “Oops, I forgot to bring my sanitizer”
- Saved thousands of lives and billions in healthcare costs

 A tiny placement shift → huge safety outcomes.

Theory: What Is Lateral Thinking?

Context: At this stage when students have seen some aspects of lateral thinking already, we introduce a bit of theory.

Definition:

Lateral thinking is the ability to solve problems by changing how you look at them, instead of following the obvious, logical steps.

Logical thinking: → “What’s the correct next step?”

Lateral thinking: → “What if we’re asking the wrong question?”

The term was coined by Edward de Bono, who described it as:

> Thinking that moves sideways rather than straight ahead.

In short:

- Logical thinking = improving what already exists
- Lateral thinking = reimagining the problem itself

Core Principles of Lateral Thinking

You can remember these as 4 mental shifts:

1. Challenge assumptions: “Does it have to be this way?”

2. Break patterns: Our brains love habits — lateral thinking interrupts them.

3. Use randomness or provocation: A strange idea can unlock a brilliant one.

4. Delay judgment: “That’s stupid” kills creativity before it starts.

One-Line Definition You Can Use Anywhere:

> Lateral thinking is solving problems by changing perspectives instead of following rules.

Real-World Examples: What Lateral Thinking Achieved

1. Post-it Notes

Problem: A failed adhesive that wasn’t strong enough

Logical response: Discard it

Lateral response: “What if weak glue is the feature?”

→ Result: 3M created Post-it Notes — a global everyday product.

2. Airbnb

Problem: Hotels are expensive and limited

Logical thinking: Build cheaper hotels

Lateral thinking: “What if people rent their own homes?”

→ Result: Airbnb

They didn’t improve hotels — they redefined accommodation.

3. **The iPhone (Touchscreens) and other smart phones**

Problem: Phones had too many buttons

Logical thinking: Smaller buttons, better layouts

Lateral thinking: “What if there were almost no buttons?”

→ Result: The modern smartphone experience led by Apple

4. Surgery & Medicine

Problem: Surgeons struggled to see clearly

Logical thinking: Better lamps

Lateral thinking: “What if the light comes from inside the body?”

→ Result: Endoscopic surgery — less invasive, faster recovery.

Practical example of how to solve problems:

Problem: Traffic jams in a city

Logical thinking: Build wider roads, add flyovers, optimize signals

Lateral thinking:

- Change work hours
- Encourage remote work
- Make cars unnecessary in some zones

Same problem. Different lens.

Activity: Real-Life Challenge: “Fix the Unfixable” (20 minutes)

Note: This activity should only be done if time permits. It is possible that the time would be a bit over 1.5 hour when the above activities would be done. If that is the case, the rest of the time should be spent on bowling (indoor, at the centre).

Purpose: Apply lateral thinking to real problems

Give each group a problem e.g.

- School backpacks are too heavy
- Phones distract students in class
- Long lines of customer at yogi (frozen yoghurt shop in East Vic Park, Perth)

Twist

- They must propose at least 3 crazy solutions
- Then refine one into a realistic idea

Presentations

1–2 minutes per group

Wrap-Up Reflection (5 minutes)

Final takeaway

> “Smart isn’t about knowing answers. It’s about seeing options.”

Difference between correct lateral thinking and deconstructionism:

Deconstructionism is about questioning and challenging everything irrespective what.

Correct lateral thinking however is different from it.

If you come up with solutions that are ‘different’ and ‘new’ but do not align wih the ultimate truth or the common sense, then they are not beneficial.

For example, if someone starts to question that why do we eat from spoons (lateral thinking question) and comes up with the idea of eating from the pen, it might not be the best idea unlesss in the survival situation.

This also shows that good ideas take us towards betterment and give good outcomes. They do not take us on the downward spiral and result in harmful or evil outcomes. If they do, this is not the lateral thinking that would improve the world.

Facilitator Cheat Sheet – The Floor Is Lava

Purpose: Stimulate **constraint-based creativity** using De Bono's lateral thinking principles (Challenge, Provocation, Alternatives, Movement).

1. Setup (1–2 min)

- Mark a **start** and **end** line
- Place a stack of **limited safe mats** at the start
- Brief the team:

Script:

"Your challenge is to get your whole group from Start to Finish without touching the floor.
Your only protection from the lava is these mats.
The constraints will change as you go — and constraints help creativity."

2. Round 1 – Baseline Challenge (3–4 min)

Let them attempt the basic version:

- Everyone must ncross
- Only mats can be stepped on
- No dragging mats

Observe patterns:

- Linear thinking
- Habitual strategies
- People defaulting to safe or predictable roles

3. Round 2 – Add Lateral Thinking Constraints (5–8 min)

Use 1–3 twists. Each twist is linked to De Bono tools.

Twists + Facilitator Line

Twist	Facilitator Line	Lateral Thinking Link
Fewer mats than people	“You now have *less* than you think you need.”	**Challenge**: break assumptions
Mats can’t be dragged	“Dragging is illegal. Find another way.”	**Provocation**: disrupt habits
One person can’t talk	“Your communicator can’t speak anymore.”	**Alternatives**: new communication
One person is blind	“This team member will rely entirely on you.”	**Movement**: explore new solutions
Mats disappear after two steps	“The lava burns them away!”	**Random entry**: forced strategy shifts

Let teams attempt solutions.

4. Creative Solutions You Can Offer (if needed)

Use sparingly — only to unblock.

Solutions for Fewer Mats

- Leapfrog mat passing
- Two people share one mat
- Human chain passing mats to front

Solutions for No Dragging

- Tossing/flicking mats ahead
- Lean-and-place method
- Flip-over mat rolling

Solutions When Someone Can’t Talk

- Pre-agreed gestures
- Silent leader becomes the observer
- Tap signals

Solutions for Blind Participant

- Human railings
- Detailed verbal guiding

- Blind person becomes mat distributor

These all demonstrate **pattern-breaking**, core to De Bono.